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SUBJECT: GERMANY/BAVARIA: THE BAVARIAN SPD APPEARS OBLIVIOUS TO
THEIR OWN DEFEAT

¶1. (SBU) The Bavarian and national Social Democratic Party's (SPD) open gloating over the blow to the Christian Social Union (CSU) in the recent Bavarian elections belied their own sorry state of affairs: the SPD had its worst showing there since WWII. With such a weak showing in that state -- and the problems it now faces in Hesse (see septel) -- there is little to indicate that the SPD's September leadership change has yet benefited the party as it gears up for Presidential, European Parliament, and Bundestag elections in ¶2009. Deep-felt voter frustrations about Bavarian CSU politics should have been water on the mill of the major opposition party here, but instead, the SPD came in with just 18.6 percent of the vote, winning just a few percentage points more than the Greens and the Independents. One cannot even attribute the SPD's dried up support to defections in favor of the Left Party; unlike in other German states, the Left Party did not make it into the Bavarian parliament.

¶2. (SBU) News analysis and continued party hand-wringing after the disastrous CSU showing have diverted attention from the fact that the opposition leader in Bavaria, the SPD, failed to profit from the CSU's historic decline. While on election eve the faces of CSU leaders showed all shades of despair and consternation, local SPD leaders were beaming with malicious joy. Political observers in Bavaria are now convinced that the SPD just does not get it. On October 28, the day when the CSU and Free Democratic Party (FDP) were trumpeting their successful coalition negotiations, political observers in Munich rubbed their eyes in disbelief when Bavarian SPD chairman Ludwig Stiegler appeared on TV to analyze the current CSU "plight." And what about analysis of how the SPD came out with this all-time low? CSU leaders Beckstein and Huber fell on their swords in defeat, but no SPD politician has resigned over their bad showing. In fact, the SPD's Landtag caucus leader Franz Maget has been confirmed in his office with 92 percent of the vote, and the Landtag caucus renominated Peter Paul Gantzer, who will turn 70 in November, deputy Landtag President. This is not a sign that the party sees the need for change at the top.

¶3. (SBU) What's more, undercutting its own few successes seems to be vintage SPD procedure in Bavaria. It is a mystery why 49-year old Axel Berg from Munich, the only SPD Bundestag deputy to directly win a constituency in Bavaria in 2005, was not afforded a safe slot when the SPD put its party list together for the 2009 Bundestag election.

¶4. (U) This report has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

¶5. (U) Follow Munich reporting at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Germ> any.

NELSON